

**State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**USDA Conference Room**  
**967 Illinois Avenue**  
**Bangor, Maine**  
**November 20, 2012**  
**10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

NRCS State Conservationist Juan Hernandez opened the meeting, welcoming the State Technical Committee (STTC) members and asked them to introduce themselves.

He announced that there was no new information regarding the Farm Bill, but will communicate with them with any forthcoming news.

Juan led a follow-up discussion on a topic that was raised at the last STTC meeting, being a change in how meetings are scheduled. The proposed change is from “regularly scheduled meetings” to “meetings scheduled as needed based on topics requiring feedback from the committee members on recommendations”. The discussion resulted in a final recommendation by the Committee to schedule meetings “as needed based on topics requiring feedback from the committee members on recommendations”.

Chris Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Special Projects, encouraged the members to look at Maine’s STTC website located at:  
<http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov/StateTechCommittee.html> . This site contains all the information and documents regarding the STTC. There are various forms and documents for potential new members, listing of all STTC members, prior meeting minutes, and documents presented at the meetings. He encouraged the members to outreach to other groups and individuals who are interested in natural resource concerns in Maine.

**Program Update – FY12 (Buster Carter, NRCS Resource Conservationist)**

Buster informed the group that the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) remains NRCS’s premier program which receives most of the funds and contracts. NRCS approached nearly \$15 million dollars in new contracts last year. The breakdown and summary of NRCS’s program dollars in combination with the program contracts for FY2012 are shown in the attached “[FY2012 Program Dollars and Contracts](#)” document.

A summary of EQIP National and State Initiative Financial Assistance contracts for FY2012 are also shown in same document. A couple of quick notes on the initiatives:

- The EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative is a National Initiative and financial assistance dollars obligated in 2012 totaled only 3 contracts totaling \$4,522. There is a requirement that producers obtain an ASABE S 612 Type 2 energy audit. The energy audit evaluates existing energy use and makes recommendations that if implemented will reduce energy use on the farm. This energy audit does not make recommendations on energy production. This energy initiative is available to all EQIP eligible agricultural producers.
- NRCS is outreaching on the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative to Maple Syrup Producers. This is an effort to help Maple Syrup Producers knowledgeable about the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative. There are three meetings scheduled in early

December for the Maple Syrup producers. Implementation contracts for the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative will need to have an ASABE S 612 Type 2 energy audit and the audit has to specify energy efficiency improvements with a minimum of a 10-year payback. If the practice is recommended in the energy audit, and the practice is on our program payment schedule, the client can apply for a financial assistance contract to implement the practice. The practice components have not been finalized for Fiscal Year 2013.

See attached handout "[Maple Syrup Producers Sessions 2012 Flyer](#)".

- NRCS has 20 initiatives nationwide and the New England/New York Forestry Initiative is one of the strongest NRCS initiatives at this time.

**Question** – Do energy audits conducted previously meet the requirement of the EQIP On-Farm Energy Initiative?

**Answer** – NRCS requires a current energy audit that meets the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) S 612 Type 2 energy audit standard. There are two options for a producer to get an energy audit that meets this standard. First a producer can hire an energy auditor (at the producers total cost) to produce an ASABE S 612 Type 2 energy audit standard. The second way is the producer can apply for an NRCS Agricultural Energy Management Conservation Activity Plan (CAP). If the producer's application is selected, NRCS will develop a "conservation contract" with the producer. This "conservation contract" details the amount of funds NRCS will provide the producer for purchasing an energy audit. The producer hires a Technical Service Provider (TSP) to develop the NRCS Agricultural Energy Management Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) (Energy Audit). TSPs are entities that have gone through the certification process with NRCS. .

Chris Jones mentioned that Maine Rural Partners –Farm Energy Partners received a Grant from the USDA Rural Development Agency to subsidize the completion of Farm Audits that meet the NRCS standard for an out-of-pocket cost of \$300. Chris stressed to the group the importance of receiving an energy audit first. The deadline for submitting applications for the 2013 signup is December 21, 2012.

**Question** – Is this audit coming out of EQIP dollars?

**Answer** – If the audit is funded through an NRCS Agricultural Energy Management –CAP, yes it is funded with EQIP funds. NRCS has set aside \$250,000 for the On-Farm Energy Initiative.

Juan explained to the committee the difference between the following State and National Initiatives in Maine:

- The Organic Initiative – This is a National Initiative
- Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative –This was previously a State Initiative, but this year became a National Initiative.
- Water Quality Initiative –NRCS works with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA is in an agreement with NRCS for us to provide assistance in improving the

water quality on the listed segments of some rivers and lakes. Maine NRCS is required to set aside 5% of our financial allocation for this Initiative. Maine has one of the most threatened watersheds in the country due to the potential water quality degradation from developments. These developments consist of conversion of private forested land to developed land.

- On-Farm Energy Initiative - NRCS needs to build and outreach on this specific program, because all the other states are benefiting from these additional dollars except Maine.
- The New England/New York Initiative – This is a Regional Initiative.
- Irrigation Initiative – Is a Statewide Initiative and financial assistance dollars come out of NRCS's allocations.
- Conservation Activity Plans – Is a State Initiative and financial assistance dollars come out of Maine NRCS's allocations.

The Organic and On-Farm Energy CAPs will compete under their respective initiative. They will not be competing in NRCS's Statewide "General" CAP pool.

The benefit of using National Initiatives instead of State is because the National dollars come out of National fund accounts instead of the State's allocated funds. Maine wants to receive as much as we can of these available additional dollars. The needs and priorities of the available dollars distributed nationwide from the National funds to various States depends entirely on the States outreaching to landowners, producers and clients. This would include States communicating about these National Initiatives on the amount of funding Maine would receive from the National funds.

**Question** – Does Forestry fall under the "General" County Pool of Sub Accounts?

**Answer** – Yes, Forestry is one of the Resource Concerns that are listed under the "General Category" located in the County Pool Sub Accounts.

The percentages are typically recommendations from the Local Working Groups to the District Conservationists. This is locally-driven conservation and NRCS welcomes recommendations from the Local Working Group on where to place financial assistance dollars and what the resource concerns are locally.

### **Program Update – FY13 (Buster Carter, NRCS Resource Conservationist)**

- The Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2012, and we are currently working under a "Continuing Resolution" until March 2013, unless, in the meantime, Congress passes a new Farm Bill.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – The authorization continues. We received funding to make the annual payments for prior year contracts, and obligating current year funds. The decision is still being discussed at National Headquarters whether or not there will be a 2013 sign up.
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – The authorization continues. Our delivery is through National and State Initiatives under the Statewide and Local Pools.

- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) – The authorization continues, but it is not likely that there will be a general sign up for WHIP this year. In FY2012, we started a new initiative through WHIP called “Working Lands for Wildlife” with the targeted species being the New England cottontail.
- Farmland & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) – The authorization continues, but we not sure how many dollars will be allocated in FY2013.
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) – The authorization ended with the expiration of the 2008 Farm Bill. We will receive an allocation to manage prior year contracts, but no new applications will be taken at this time.
- Geographical Rate Caps (GARCs) have been developed for WRP, which will remain the same as FY2012. These were developed in anticipation of continued delivery of WRP, before it was known that the new farm bill would not be passed. The development of GARCs for the GRP was waived again for 2013. If the GRP is reauthorized for FY2013 and easement offers are submitted, the acquisition cost per acre will be based on the individual appraisals.
- AMA, EQIP, and WHIP payment rates are regionalized for all conservation practices in FY2013. NRCS should be posting these payment rates in December 2012 on the Maine NRCS Home page.
- Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) Payment Rates have all been nationalized for FY2013. These will include the rates for Conservation Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs). These rates are posted on the TSP website.  
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/technical/tsp/>  
 This is the first year that CAP applications are going to be ranked. If application requests exceed available funding for the sign-up period, NRCS will work on a first-come first-served basis as we have in the past if application ranking scores are tied. National Headquarters has developed the CAP ranking questions. NRCS in Maine has set aside a million dollars in FY2013 for the general CAP funding pool. CAPs related to organic transition and energy conservation also will be considered for funding within their respective national Initiatives. Maine NRCS is mandated to use the nationalized payment rates and the ranking process. The District Conservationists are required to use the Ranking Tool statewide to establish the ranking points regarding these plans.

Juan explained to the group what is included in the December 21, 2012 deadline in relation to the following:

- FY 2013 EQIP Initiatives - Organic, Seasonal High Tunnel, On-Farm Energy, NE/NY Forestry, Water Conservation (Irrigation)
- FY 2013 WHIP - Working Lands for Wildlife (New England Cottontail)
- FY2013 EQIP - Conservation Activity Plans

National/Regional Initiatives to be delivered in FY2013:

- EQIP – New England/New York Initiative, Organic Initiative, On-Farm Energy Initiative, Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative, and Water Quality Initiative, pending NHQ guidance
- WHIP – Working Lands for Wildlife (New England Cottontail) Initiative

State Initiatives to be delivered in FY2013:

- EQIP - Water Conservation (Irrigation) Initiative, Salmon Falls Initiative, and Pleasant River Initiative

**Recommendations of Irrigation Subcommittee (ISC) – Tim Hobbs, Subcommittee Representative**

Chris informed the STTC of the new Irrigation Sub Committee (ISC) of the State Technical Committee. The ISC had their first meeting in November 2012. The ISC's mission is to develop recommendations and present them to the State Technical Committee (STTC) for recommendation to the NRCS State Conservationist for approval.

Tim reported to the STTC that there are approximately 14 members of the ISC, which consists of federal agencies, state agencies, groups, organizations, and other partners.

The ISC was presented information on NRCS dollars that were spent in Fiscal Years 2010 – 2012. They compared the number of contracts and dollars spent that went with the different Irrigation practices they cost shared on. Out of the three fiscal years, in EQIP there was approximately 4.5 million dollars contracted with 37 producers. The AMA program was 2.4 million dollars contracted with 51 producers.

**Application Ranking Summary 2013 Maine Water Conservation (Irrigation) Document ([see attached document](#))**

The majority of the time was on discussing the NRCS Ranking Tool located in the “*Application Ranking Summary 2013 Maine Water Conservation (Irrigation)*” document. The ISC's attention was focused on the National Priorities Addressed on the “Ranking Summary” document. Tim Hobbs stressed to the STTC it was not the ISC's task to make recommendations on the National Ranking questions. The group was informed of the new process NRCS is mandated to use by National Headquarters in FY2013.

The major issue discussed was that NRCS is lacking Irrigation Technical Service Providers (TSPs). There is a huge demand to communicate this need to the public sector. NRCS has a huge workload at this time and does not have the manpower to complete irrigation practices and plans. Tim stated that he does not know if this new process has been changed in the last three or four years, but mentioned the process being very difficult for private businesses regarding justifying payment schedules in relationship to their business.

Juan stated to the group that NRCS now has approximately 60 Certified Forestry TSPs in Maine. NRCS is trying to make the process of becoming a certified TSP as easy as possible. Juan stressed to the group he wants at least someone to have a conversation with anyone interested in the NRCS process of becoming a Certified TSP in developing Irrigation practices and plans.

Tim mentioned that the ISC commented about the volume of the NRCS contracts, and where the practices went. The ISC was informed that developing Irrigation CAPs are very expensive and technically detailed. The ISC wants to communicate to the STTC the huge demand to outreach to companies, private sectors, etc. in search for interested and capable people to develop water management plans (Irrigation CAPs) and encourage them to contact NRCS immediately.

The ISC was informed by NRCS that the average EQIP funds in an EQIP contract in Maine is \$16,000, while the average EQIP funds in an Irrigation EQIP contract in Maine is \$160,000.

*State Issues Addressed section of the "Application Ranking Summary – 2013 Maine Water Conservation (Irrigation)" Document*

The ISC went over the State Issues section of the Ranking Tool document. The committee had significant discussions on Question 3a, 3b, and 3c and the different scenarios that would come into a field office as far as the application process when they are looking at constructing different sources and how to get the most points for the individual producers.

\*Recommendation was made by the ISC to remove Question #4 – in "State Issues Section" of this document.

\*Recommendation was made by the ISC to develop a Question 3d in State Issues Section, which would resolve this problem about the amount of points being distributed.

*Local Issues Addressed section of the "Application Ranking Summary – 2013 Maine Water Conservation (Irrigation)" Document*

Question #9 – Discussion on whether or not it was legal for a producer not to use any associated water savings to bring new land. It was the understanding at the ISC meeting that you could not do that. Since then, it has been discovered that you can do this.

\*Recommendation was made by ISC to Award 150 points to the individual if they agreed **NOT** to do this. This would give them a higher priority in the ranking process.

*Additional Maine NRCS Irrigation Assistance Requirements and MDEP Chapter 587 Applicability Determination Process Document (see attached document)*

There were a lot of negative comments on the Maine NRCS Irrigation Policy statement ("MDEP will determine any Chapter 587 requirements") in the above mentioned document. A decision was made that this works and we will not change the policy at this time.

\*Recommended to leave the statement the way it is.

Juan requested input from the ISC on the \$1 million allocated for Irrigation practices. The group was satisfied with the dollars allocated and recommended that it not be raised at this time.

NRCS has the opportunity to change the allocated amount for irrigation applications. This would be based on the needs received to fund 50% of any application above the \$1 million set level which is stated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Tim mentioned the ISC commented on the ability for producers to reach the \$300,000 CAP on different programs. There is a provision in the Farm Bill that there could be a request through the Secretary to have the CAP raised to \$450,000 if there is an environmental benefit to do so. This was discussed and requested NRCS to research this further.

Tim thanked the ISC for selecting him to represent them and feels it is very beneficial to him.

Juan spoke about the ISC being the first Sub Committee of the State Technical Committee that he has seen. He was very pleased on how the meeting went and with the recommendations the sub-committee developed.

**Proposal by Maine Forest Service For Forestry Subcommittee** - Andy Schultz, Landowner Outreach Forester (see attached handout ["Forestry Subcommittee"](#))

Andy Schultz proposed to the STTC to create a Forestry Sub Committee within the NRCS State Technical Committee. Andy said that the purpose of this Sub Committee would be to provide advice and recommendations to the STTC regarding conservation programs and initiatives, such as EQIP, WHIP, CSP, New England/New York Forestry Initiative, and others that affect forestland owners and forestland in Maine. Maine is a heavily forested state, on a percent of land cover basis. Woodland owners are explicitly included as "producers" with respect to Farm Bill conservation programs. Local Working Groups have made great strides to include forestland owners and consulting foresters. Forestry topics are rarely included in the STTC meetings.

The size of the Sub Committees should be smaller than the STTC. Any member of the STTC can become a member of the Sub Committee, as long as the list consists of no more than 14 members. The list and size of the Sub Committee will be approved by the NRCS State Conservationist.

**\*STTC Recommends to the State Conservationist to create a Forestry Sub Committee. The State Conservationist accepted the Recommendation.**

**Report on Grant to Develop Management Plans for New England Cottontail and American Woodcock** – Grant Mecozzi, National Wild Turkey Federation

The National Wild Turkey Federation (WTF) received a National Grant in June 2012 to do 16 site plans, outreach work and public relations work in Maine, New Hampshire and New York. The focus is to create an Early Successional Habitat for New England cottontail. They started in September 2012 with a field seminar and a couple of landowner site visits. Grant Mecozzi requested help from the STTC on outreach to landowners on this grant. Preference is given to the New England cottontail Working Lands for Wildlife focus areas, and they have also incorporated the American Woodcock areas.

**Input of Obtaining State Technical Committee Review of Conservation Practice Standards (CPS)** – Cathee Pullman, State Resource Conservationist (see attached ["Proposed CPS Review Procedure"](#) document)

Cathee Pullman gave an overview of the procedures of reviewing NRCS Conservation Practice Standards.



*National CPS* – Each National CPS is formally reviewed at least once every 5 years. All revisions or additions to the National CPSs are posted in the Federal Register for a comment period not less than 30 days.

*State CPS* – States may adopt the National CPS and modify them to become a State CPS, along with having a review and comment period. Current and modified CPSs are posted for review on the Maine NRCS website. The comment period for reviewing these CPSs is two weeks. The name of the NRCS technical discipline is located on all drafts with their contact number and email address to submit comments and responses regarding the draft CPSs. If Maine NRCS adopts a National CPS, a comment period is not needed. If Maine NRCS modifies a National CPS the procedure is located in General Manual – 450 – Subpart A – Part 401.1.

There is a listing of the Conservation Practice Standards listed that are scheduled to be revised in Fiscal Year 2013. (See attached [“Conservation Practice Standards”](#) document).

\*The STTC made a Recommendation to the State Conservationist to adopt the new procedure for Reviewing Conservation Practice Standards.

**Wetland Conservation Input** – Lindsay Hodgman, Assistant State Soil Scientist (see attached [“State Offsite Mapping Methods”](#) document)

The Maine NRCS State Off-Site Wetland Method, which was revised in October 2012, is to be used as a resource in conjunction with the Food Security Act protocol. This method is to enable Maine NRCS to utilize comparison sites/imagery signatures in a more consistent and defensible way.

**Report on Revision of NRCS Nutrient Management Conservation Practice (Code 590)** – Alice Begin, Resource Conservationist (see attached [“Nutrient Management 590”](#), [“Leaching Index”](#) and [“P Index”](#) documents)

Alice explained to the STTC the National Standards being adopted by the States. The National Standards were updated this year in January 2012. The States have until January 1, 2013 to comply or adopt these standards. She referred basically to the Nutrient Management Conservation Practice (Code 590) in relation to the following:

- Emphasis on the Four R's – Right Placement; Right Amount; Right Timing; and Right Source
- Soil Loss must be brought down to “T” – Nutrients can move with erosion; Reduce nutrient loss to surface water; T = “Tolerable” rate of soil loss for a given soil; RUSLE2 is used to calculate T for a given crop management system.
- Modified Morgan (MM) Soils Testing Method – Best extract method to use in acidic soils; No reliable conversions to Modified Morgan; Must specifically request MM from labs; Fertility recommendations should be based on University information.
- Nitrogen Leaching Index – Leaching Index is determined by soil Hydrologic Group, climate/rainfall intensity; Leaching potential for Maine soils “Moderate” and “High”; Moderate – consider Best Management Practices (BMPs); High – Utilize applicable BMPs.



- Phosphorus Index – Estimates potential for P loss to the environment; Site specific; Used where  $P_{2O_5}$  application will exceed recommendation; Fields receiving manures/compost; Index will provide P limit; More restrictive than current N&P Matrix; A numerical P Index Rating is determined by factors including: Erosion/Management; Soil Test P levels; Planned P inputs; Proximity to surface water flows.